

## **What Will It Take to Double Employment of Minnesotans with Disabilities by 2015?**

### ***Consensus Recommendations from the 2011 Summary Report of the Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative***

Individuals with disabilities have an employment rate less than one-third that of citizens without disabilities, and 65% of individuals who experience poverty long-term have a disability. Employment provides a path out of poverty and dependence on government benefits and into the opportunities available to other citizens to exercise self-determination toward achieving quality of life goals.

During 2009 and 2010, over 200 individuals participated in listening sessions facilitated by the Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative about doubling employment of Minnesotans with disabilities. Sessions were hosted by organizations representing eight disability groups, in addition to groups focusing on transition from school to work and on the roles of families. Listening session participants included individuals and self-advocates with disabilities, family members, educators, postsecondary institutions, disability advocacy organizations, state and local government, employment services organizations and others. Nine policy briefs were developed from the listening sessions. Analysis of recommendations identified a consensus across groups around the recommendations below toward aligning policies, services and practices to ensure that competitive employment is widely recognized and routinely promoted as the preferred outcome of all Minnesotans with disabilities. The individual policy briefs and the entire summary report can be accessed at <http://www.mn-epi.org/reports/index.asp>.

#### **Recommendations on Transition-Aged Adults and Families**

- **Ensure families have expectations of employment for their children with disabilities.**
- **Utilize social connections, or social capital, during job development to achieve better employment outcomes and to empower families during transition.**
- **Ensure students with disabilities have real jobs for real pay while they are still attending school.**
- **Ensure young adults with disabilities graduate directly and seamlessly into competitive jobs or postsecondary education.**
- **Redesign transition services for young adults aged 18-21 to produce better employment and postsecondary education outcomes through interagency collaboration.**

#### **Recommendations to Double Employment**

- **Ensure that competitive employment is an expectation of Minnesotans with disabilities and those who support them.**
- **Conduct statewide public education about the economic benefits of competitive employment to Minnesotans with disabilities and the resources available to provide individualized guidance about maximizing earnings without jeopardizing the safety net of sustainable health care and independent living assistance.**

- **Incorporate customized employment strategies as an alternative to traditional job development approaches to address the many obstacles encountered by jobseekers with disabilities.**
- **Ensure jobseekers with disabilities have access to professionals with expertise about addressing the challenges of their particular disability and ensure that expertise is accessible throughout Minnesota.**
- **Ensure transition-aged youth and adults with disabilities have access to postsecondary education, vocational training, and other career development opportunities to support their current and future job goals.**
- **Provide access to employment supports targeting job retention through a “rapid response service” for individuals who are not receiving ongoing supports or supported employment services.**
- **Develop a consolidated accommodations fund accessible to individuals with disabilities and employers to promote employment, retention and career advancement.**
- **Support Minnesotans with disabilities in developing self-advocacy and self-determination skills to ensure the greatest possible control over their services and supports.**
- **Ensure self-employment services are an employment option for Minnesotans with disabilities.**
- **Engage champions within the business community (and public sector) to create more employment opportunities for Minnesotans with disabilities.**
- **Ensure that Minnesota’s WorkForce Centers and the services they provide are accessible and usable by people with disabilities.**
- **Increase funding for public transportation, including Metro Mobility and other specialized transportation options, to expand the areas served and the times transportation is available.**

**Additional Recommendations**

- **Develop comparable data across state agencies to determine the competitive employment rate of its citizens with disabilities.**
- **Provide ongoing training and technical assistance to a variety of stakeholders to increase employment outcomes.**
- **Develop measures that indicate the return on investment of employment of Minnesotans with disabilities.**
- **Maintain and publicize a centralized resource like the Disability Linkage Line (DLL) to assist Minnesotans in navigating available resources across disability groups.**